

Indian Minister Insists Government Had No Part in Svetlana Defection

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The Indian Government, giving its first official accounting of the "Svetlana affair" today, took the stand that India was an innocent bystander in the whole embarrassing episode.

Minister of External Affairs C. M. Chagla, in facing a barrage of questions in Parliament, seemed equally determined to neither ruffle his country's friends in the United States nor those in Russia.

Chagla disclosed that the U.S. Embassy bought the airline ticket for Svetlana Stalin from here to Rome two weeks ago, and sent a U.S. official to accompany the daughter of the late Josef Stalin.

But in the face of cries from the floor of "CIA, CIA," the Minister said that U.S. Ambassador Chester Bowles had "emphatically and categorically denied" to him that the Embassy Second Secretary who squired Svetlana on her plane flight to Rome was a member of the Central Intelligence Agency, as charged in the press.

The Second Secretary,

Robert F. Rayle, is listed in the diplomatic directory as concerned with political and economic affairs in the U.S. Embassy's External Affairs Section.

Chagla then assured Parliament that "if anything comes to our light or knowledge which deflects from what the Ambassador has said we will certainly take necessary action." Other Indian officials later indicated that they thought Bowles had no choice but to deny such a report when Chagla called for an explanation.

Not Informed

Chagla told Parliament that the Indian Government was not informed of Miss Stalin's defection to the West until more than 24 hours after she left here. He indicated that she simply phoned for a taxi one evening from the Soviet Embassy block and walked into the U.S. Embassy to ask for help in defecting.

Miss Stalin had a valid Russian passport and Indian visa, which had been extended, Chagla said. He denied that

India had refused her asylum or a further extension of her visa. She was given an American visa before her departure on an Australian airliner, he added.

Family Obligation

Chagla mentioned that Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's confidant, Commerce Minister Dinesh Singh, had put Svetlana up during part of her stay in India. He emphasized that since Svetlana had come to India to toss into the Ganges the ashes of her late friend and Dinesh Singh's uncle, Kanwar Brajesh Singh, the Commerce Minister was merely extending hospitality as a private family obligation.

A member wondered why Svetlana hadn't been allowed to stay in India since her "marriage" to Kanwar Brajesh Singh would have changed her nationality from Russian to Indian.

Chagla gulped for only a second and then said: "Her marriage was not registered in Russia and the Indian gentleman had a wife here who was not divorced."

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